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SUBJECT: "PEACE MISSION 2007": SCO MILITARY LINKS GROWING,
BUT A LONG WAY FROM LATTER DAY WARSAW PACT

REF: MOSCOW 3996

Classified By: Deputy Political M/C Colin Cleary. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Experts told us that the Shanghai Cooperation Organization's (SCO) Peace Mission 2007 anti-terrorist exercises, while deemed a success by many Russians, do not necessarily point to increased integration among SCO member states. The 6,500 soldiers involved in the exercises reportedly lived and trained well together, but differences between the member states' governments will continue to hobble any efforts to transform the SCO into a military alliance. Lack of a coherent Russian policy toward Central Asia will also prove to be an impediment. The experts agreed that Peace Mission 2007 was an anti-terrorist exercise, not aimed at any one country. END SUMMARY.

The View From The Ground

¶2. (C) Victor Litovkin, Assistant Editor of the online journal "Independent Military Overview," observed the August 9-17 Shanghai Cooperation Organization's Peace Mission 2007 anti-terrorist exercises and told us that the exercises went well (reftel). "Any such military exercises are a show," he said, but the exercises demonstrated a high level of coordination between the Russian and Chinese militaries. He attributed this success to the fact that the militaries of the various member states have been living and training well together.

¶3. (C) Litovkin said that on a strategic level, the military exercises were intended to showcase the SCO's capability to defend Central Asian interests, noting that a chief objective of the exercises was to train soldiers how to respond to a terrorist attack. He stressed that the exercises were not aimed at the West. Despite Iranian President Ahmadinejad's vague anti-U.S. statements during the SCO's summit in Bishkek August 16, "nobody even mentioned the United States during the exercises," Litovkin said. He went on to say the exercises were also not designed to train soldiers to intervene in Central Asian states, should revolution occur. Pointing to the lack of Russian interference during the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan, Litovkin argued that, while Russia and China want stability in Central Asia, they will not send troops to prop up the governments there.

Internal Rivalries Limit the SCO In the Short-Term

¶4. (C) Dmitriy Litovkin, political correspondent with Izvestia, confidant of First Deputy Prime Minister Sergey Ivanov, and son of journalist Victor Litovkin, told us August 15 that despite Peace Mission 2007, the SCO is not set to

become a modern-day Warsaw Pact. China, he pointed out, declined to join the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Some members of the Russian leadership, he said, take this as a sign that, not only is China not interested in an alliance with Russia, but it may pose a threat to Russian interests. There is real concern among Russia's political elites, he stated, that China desires Russia's natural resources. While this will not soon lead to war, a rivalry could ensue. For this reason, the SCO will remain a largely economic organization.

¶15. (C) On August 20 Moskovskiy Komsomolets journalist Mikhail Rostovskiy agreed, adding that Russia's lack of a coherent foreign policy, especially in Central Asia, limits Russia's ability to control and direct events in the region and in the SCO. Russia, he said, wants to be strong in the face of the United States and China, but does not know how to pursue its goals.

The Janus Face of Russian Policy

¶16. (C) Andrey Grozin, Head of the Central Asia and Kazakhstan Department of the CIS Institute, told us on August 21 that Peace Mission 2007 is intended to signal Russia's willingness to seek Asian and Central Asian partners; in reality, however, Russian political elites are more comfortable interacting with the West. Russians, he argued, do not trust China because they do not understand it as well as they do the West. There exists in Russia a particularly strong anti-Chinese sentiment among the leadership, he argued. Many Russian politicians regard China as a "complicated partner," and potential threat since it is

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strong both militarily and economically. Seeking a close relationship with China, he said, would cause many problems, as the two countries are natural rivals for influence in Central Asia and the rest of the world.

Anti-Terrorist, Anti-Islamist, Arms Show

¶17. (C) Deputy Editor of the "Weekly Journal" Alexander Golts told us on August 13 that Peace Mission 2007 was more anti-separatist than anti-terrorist in nature. Russia and China, he stated, want stability in Central Asia, and SCO training exercises that promote stability are in Russia's best interests. Golts argued, however, that it will be difficult for the SCO to become a military alliance in the absence of clear security threats from the outside. Peace Mission 2007 also provided Russia with an opportunity to show off its military hardware and attract buyers.

¶18. (C) In an August 14 meeting, Pavel Felgenhauer, defense analyst with "Novaya Gazeta," echoed Golts's sentiments. He added, however, that, not only does Russia wish to prevent separatists from achieving their goals in Central Asia, it also wants to keep Islamist radicals at bay. The show of force during Peace Mission 2007, it is hoped, will demonstrate the SCO member countries' ability to deal with the threat posed by Islamist radicals and separatists.
Melville